



Young Social Science Faculty Members and Their Role in Achieving *Atmanirbhar Bharat*

A talk by Dr. Basheerhamad Shadrach (bshadrach@col.org), Director, CEMCA

Dear Professor Indrajit Lahiri, Professor Ami Upadhyay, Ms Melinda Pavek, Professor Anirban Ghosh, Professor Arun Kumar Chakraborty, Dr Anamika Das, and Dr Barnali Roy Chowdhury,

I wish to congratulate Professor Chakraborty for taking the initiative to nurture the young minds and to prepare them for a national cause. Often, as young faculty members, we look up to someone to draw inspiration. Here is an inspirational leader who wishes to see these young people develop interest in continuous professional development and reach greater heights, especially in nation building.

I bring greetings from the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), the only regional centre of Commonwealth of Learning (COL)! The Heads of Governments of the Commonwealth who met in Okanagan, Vancouver in 1987, had the vision to create a global, rather a Commonwealth, institution solely dedicated to promoting quality education and skills through open and distance learning. Since then, hosted by the Canadian government, COL exists as an intergovernmental body under the umbrella of the Commonwealth. Its regional centre in Delhi was established in the first decade of COL at the behest of the Indian government that wished to see an Asian regional centre established in India. Since the mid-1990s, CEMCA has existed as an intergovernmental body based out of Delhi!

CEMCA and Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU) have been long standing partners in efforts to bring quality education and skills to millions of people in the state of West Bengal. Similarly, in partnership with other Open Universities (OU) such as the Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University in Ahmedabad, headed by Professor Upadhyay, we support Open Education, Affordable Education and Quality Education amongst the people of the Commonwealth. CEMCA works with each of the 33 OUs and almost all of the dual mode universities around the Commonwealth. India is gifted with 18 such OUs, the most for any nation in the world. India also enjoys the distinction of having the largest number of individuals pursuing education through Open and Distance mode. It is phenomenal that a huge load of Indian education is taken up by the OUs and in a user-friendly and affordable manner. It is also heartening to know that each of these 18 OUs are becoming extremely agile and adaptive to the recent technological developments, providing the best learning experience for everyone who walks through the OU system. We commend the NSOU, BAOU and other universities for the important role they play.

The idea of nurturing young minds to trans-disciplinary research to achieve *Atmanirbhar Bharat* is quite unique. Again, thanks to NSOU, we have this programme, supported by the Indian Council for Social Science Research, where 30 young people have been brought together to explore these concepts, and more so, the role of research in achieving a self-reliant India.

The idea of self-reliance, although existed perhaps since the beginning of mankind, became popular with the essay written by an American transcendentalist Philosopher, Ralph Waldo Emerson who interestingly highlighted that every human being should avoid conformity and false consistency and follow one's own instincts and ideas.

“A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines.”

The above became a famous quote; not only that, it initiated the thought process – Learning and forgetting and learning again! Taking the idea further, the philosophers who arrived later, explained that individuals are not expected to endure life alone. They are surrounded by ‘helps and aids’ of all kinds, supporting, sustaining, and journeying with them!

The idea of self-reliant India, *Atmanirbhar Bharat*, as explained by Prime Minister Modi, is an umbrella concept for India to become more efficient, competitive, and resilient. All ministries and departments in Indian government, since then, took the concept seriously and have started to work towards *Atmanirbhar Bharat*. The Ministry of Education, Government of India, pronounced its National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) with an aim to establish the Indian Education System as second to none with equitable access to the highest quality education for all learners, regardless of their social and economic background or status, by 2040. This is where the OUs and NSOU play an important role!

In the last century, the idea of *Atmanirbhar Bharat* was tried out by various personalities very successfully. Gandhiji started the first political self-reliance movement and Netaji Subhas Bose is credited with initiating the first military-oriented self-reliance movement! We also witnessed the Bombay Plan for economic self-reliance by JRD Tata, G D Birla and A Dalal. While some of these succeeded; surely, Gandhiji's self-reliance based on non-cooperation and non-violence movement succeeded, but we have not been able to attain economic freedom for a long time, resulting in dependency for food and raw material!

Professor Swaminathan on one hand and Professor Varghese Kurian, on the other, demonstrated self-reliance through their Green and White Revolutions. The Green Revolution which depended upon the hard-working Punjab farmers turned India into a breadbasket from a begging bowl, later relied heavily on skills, training, visitation and communication. And the latest version of the Green Revolution in the form of Evergreen Revolution relied upon people's knowledge and power as the basis for self-reliance, leading to productivity in perpetuity without causing ecological harm in an inclusive manner – pro-poor, pro-women, and pro-nature. The essence of Sustainable Development!

You can see the vision of Swaminathan relying upon skills, knowledge, and public action for self-reliance! He bridged the gap between public policy and social action; and science and society. He also ensured that non-academic stakeholders such as the farmers become the mainstay in implementing governmental programmes, thereby combining scientific knowledge with traditional wisdom!

As we march towards the next phase of Indian journey into self-reliance, I would call upon the social scientists to take research seriously, especially in ensuring that the research is not conducted in silo or for only moving the scientific spiral of knowledge, but one that transcends beyond one's own individual self to one that, as the philosophers and thinkers, who arrived after Emerson, put it. Individuals are not expected to endure life alone! They are surrounded by 'helps and aids' of all kinds, supporting and sustaining and journeying with them. In the event of India, the help comes from within. In each one's understanding of the other, and appreciation of others' efforts as much as one's own.

Taking the idea further, these philosophers explained that individuals are not expected to endure life alone. They are surrounded by 'helps and aids' of all kinds, supporting, sustaining, and journeying with them! So, the idea of transdisciplinary research is to go beyond social science to get to understand philosophy, religion, languages, science, technology, fine arts, literature, history, geography and so on! The idea of cultivating collaborative thinking and multi- and trans-disciplinary thinking alone can take India into the next phase of *Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan*!

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for your attention!